

Message Text

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HEREWITH FULL TEXT NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE THURSDAY, JUNE
16 HEADED "MR. VORSTER'S SHIFT. BY ANTHONY LEWIS.

LONDON--THE CONFLICTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA ARE SO PROFOUND
THAT A WISE PERSON IS WARY OF ANY TALK ABOUT EARLY OR
PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS. BUT AMONG BRITISH LEADERS AND
AMERICAN DIPLOMATS HERE WHO DEAL WITH AFRICA THERE IS A
NEW NOTE OF HOPE, CAUTIOUS BUT TOO DISTINCT TO IGNORE.

THE IMMEDIATE REASON IS A CHANGE OF POSITION BY THE SOUTH
AFRICAN PRIME MINISTER, B. J. VORSTER, ON THE ISSUE OF
NAMIBIA (SOUTH-WEST AFRICA). MR. VORSTER HAS GONE A LONG
WAY TOWARD ACCEPTING THE VIEWS OF THE UNITED STATES,
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BRITAIN AND OTHER WESTERN POWERS ON HOW NAMIBIA SHOULD
BECOME INDEPENDENT. IN DOING SO, HE BY ALL APPEARANCES
ABANDONED WHAT HAD BEEN HIS OWN FIRMLY-DECLARED POLICY.

THE NAMIBIAN SHIFT IS ARCANE IN ITS DETAILS BUT IT IS
WORTH SKETCHING BECAUSE IT COULD LEAD TO REAL POLITICAL

CHANGE IN A HUGE TERRITORY, BIGGER THAN TEXAS, WITH GREAT MINERAL RESOURCES. MOREOVER, SOME THINK IT SIGNALLED A NEW FLEXIBILITY ON MR. VORSTER'S PART GENERALLY, AND THAT WOULD HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR ALL OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.

MR. VORSTER HAS PROPOSED TO GIVE NAMIBIA INDEPENDENCE UNDER A LOOSE FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, BASED ON ETHNIC GROUPS, WITH WHITES STILL PLAYING A KEY ROLE. AFRICAN NATIONALISTS DISMISSED THE IDEA AS A WAY OF MAINTAINING SOUTH AFRICAN CONTROL BY ANOTHER NAME. BUT MR. VORSTER PRESSED ON, CONVENING WHAT WAS CALLED THE TURNHALLE CONFERENCE OF TRIBAL REPRESENTATIVES TO DRAFT AN ETHNIC CONSTITUTION FOR THE NEW STATE.

IN RECENT MONTHS THE WESTERN POWERS HAVE URGED MR. VORSTER TO ABANDON THE TURNHALLE PLAN. HE AGREED THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN ELECTION IN NAMIBIA BEFORE INDEPENDENCE, WITH NATIONALISTS WHO OPPOSE THE TURNHALLE IDEA TAKING PART. BUT HE SAID THE ELECTIONS WOULD HAVE TO BE HELD BY AN INTERIM REGIME BASED ON THE TURNHALLE CONFERENCE.

LAST WEEK MR. VORSTER GAVE UP THAT LAST SIGNIFICANT POINT OF RESISTANCE. HE DROPPED THE IDEA OF AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT IN NAMIBIA ALTOGETHER. INSTEAD, HE SAID THAT A SINGLE ADMINISTRATOR WOULD RUN THE TERRITORY UNTIL ITS PEOPLE ELECT A NEW CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. AND HE APPEARS TO HAVE AGREED THAT A SECRETARIAT SUPPLIED BY THE UNITED NATIONS WOULD ADVISE THE ADMINISTRATOR AND THAT THE U.N. WOULD PLAY A ROLE IN SUPERVISING THE ELECTIONS.

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ALL THAT REPRESENTS A SHARP CHANGE OF ATTITUDE ON MR. VORSTER'S PART. HE HAS BEEN STRONGLY OPPOSED TO ANY UNITED NATIONS ROLE IN NAMIBIA. AND HE REPORTEDLY HAS ASSURED THE TURNHALLE DELEGATES THAT THEY WOULD AT LEAST MANAGE THE TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE.

JOHN VORSTER HAS THE REPUTATION OF BEING A MAN WHO DOES NOT EASILY CHANGE HIS MIND OR HIS POLICY. IF HIS SHIFT ON NAMIBIA IS REAL--AND OFFICIALS HERE ARE CONVINCED IT IS-- THEN THE INTERESTING QUESTION IS WHAT MOVED HIM.

AT LEAST WHEN THE DEEPEST CONCERNS OF THE AFRIKANER PEOPLE ARE NOT AT STAKE, MR. VORSTER IS A REALIST. HE EVIDENTLY HAS COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT CHANGE CAN NO LONGER BE

AVOIDED ON THE FRINGES OF SOUTH AFRICA--AND THAT RESISTING THERE ADDS TO THE DANGERS FOR SOUTH AFRICA ITSELF.

BUT DROPPING THE COMMITMENT TO THE TURNHALLE GROUP IS STILL A SUDDEN STEP, WITH SOME POLITICAL RISK FOR MR. VORSTER. THERE MUST BE A MORE IMMEDIATE EXPLANATION FOR HIS MOVING SO QUICKLY, AND IT IS NOT HARD TO SUGGEST ONE: THE POLICY OF THE NEW AMERICAN GOVERNMENT.

WITH ALL THE CONFUSION OF THEIR EARLY DAYS, JIMMY CARTER AND HIS ADMINISTRATION HAVE NOW COMMUNICATED CLEARLY THAT THEY GIVE A HIGH PRIORITY TO ENDING RACIAL OPPRESSION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. AND THOSE ARE NOT JUST HIGH-FLOWN SENTIMENTS. THE AMERICANS HAVE PLAYED AN ACTIVE PART IN ORGANIZING DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY FOR CHANGE IN NAMIBIA AND RHODESIA.

THE NEW BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY, DAVID OWEN, HAS ALSO MADE SOUTHERN AFRICA A PRINCIPAL AREA OF HIS INTEREST. HE MAY HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED IN PART BY A CONCERN, GIVEN THE UNCLASSIFIED

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ACTIVE NEW AMERICAN POLICY, FOR BRITAIN'S VITAL INVESTMENT IN AND TRADE WITH SOUTH AFRICA. IN ANY EVENT, HE HAS PRODUCED IMPORTANT NEW IDEAS FOR DIPLOMACY IN THE AREA.

DR. OWEN'S PARTICULAR EMPHASIS IS ON RHODESIA. AFTER THE BREAKTHROUGH LAST SEPTEMBER, WHEN HENRY KISSINGER'S INITIATIVE LED THE WHITE RHODESIAN LEADER, IAN SMITH, TO ACCEPT THE PRINCIPLE OF MAJORITY RULE, NEGOTIATIONS STALLED. NOW, ON THAT INTRACTABLE ISSUE, AS ON NAMIBIA, THERE IS SOME FEELING OF HOPE IN LONDON.

TO A GREAT EXTENT, THE HOPE RESTS ON MR. VORSTER. WITH JIMMY CARTER IN OFFICE, HE CAN NO LONGER EXPECT TO TRADE HIS HELP ON NAMIBIA AND RHODESIA FOR AMERICAN WILLINGNESS TO GIVE WHITE SUPREMACY MORE TIME IN SOUTH AFRICA. BUT MR. VORSTER MAY STILL THINK A CONTROLLED TRANSITION PREFERABLE. THE SIGNS ARE THAT HE DOES--THAT HE IS ADJUSTING TO THE NEW DIPLOMATIC REALITY.

IT IS NECESSARY TO ADD THAT THE ISSUES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA WILL REMAIN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT EVEN IF MR. VORSTER IS MORE FLEXIBLE AND BRINGS WHITE OPINION ALONG WITH HIM. THE EXPECTATION OF VICTORY IS NOT LIKELY TO MAKE AFRICAN

NATIONALISTS MORE REASONABLE, OR MORE UNIFIED, IN NAMIBIA OR RHODESIA. AND NOW SOUTH AFRICA ITSELF HAS HAD A TASTE OF URBAN TERROR, WITH ALL OF ITS INCALCULABLE CONSEQUENCES." CHRISTOPHER

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